Co-op Corner

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The National Weather Service (NWS) Cooperative Observer Program (Co-op) is truly the nation's weather and climate observing network of, by and for the people. Over 11,000 volunteers take observations on farms, in urban and suburban areas, our National Parks, seashores, and mountaintops. The data is truly representative of where people live, work and play. The Co-op program was formally created in 1890. Its mission is two-fold. Its first purpose is to provide observational meteorological data, usually consisting of daily maximum and minimum temperatures, snowfall, and 24-hour precipitation totals, required to define the climate of the United States and to help measure long-term climate changes. Its second purpose is to provide observational meteorological data in near real-time to support forecast, warning and other public service programs of the NWS.

Big Fork Cooperative weather observer (left) receives a 10 year Length of Service award.

Co-op observational data supports the NWS climate program and field operations. The program responsibilities include: Selecting data sites, recruiting, appointing and training of observers, installing and maintaining equipment, keeping station documentation, paying observers, collecting data and its delivery to users and finally maintaining data quality control. To see recent data from the Co-op network in Arkansas, go on line to **http://www.srh.noaa.gov/data/LIT/AGO/LITAGOLIT.1.txt**

The Co-op network is the backbone of temperature and precipitation (including snowfall) observations describing the United States climate. This network of volunteer weather observers is located at non-airport locations. These locations include urban, suburban and rural areas, farms, mountaintops, national, state, and local park settings. This network, and about 1,000 Automated Surface Observing System (ASOS) airport stations, forms the federal government surface weather and climate observing network for the United States. Participants are provided with a set of simple weather instruments and observing instructions by the NWS, which manages the network.

Here is a picture of some equipment used in the program.

On the left is a Fischer & Porter rain gage. This gage records rainfall every 15 minutes by punching the rainfall amount on a paper tape. The observer empties the gage on the first day of the month and mails the tape to the local National Weather Service office.

In the middle is a standard rain gage. Co-op observers use this gage to record how much rain falls over a 24 hour period. Most observers record the rain at 7 am and report the amount to their local National Weather Service office. On the right is a temperature sensor. The shelter on top covers a sensor that transmits data to a display unit inside the observer's home or office. The inside unit stores the highest and lowest temperature readings as well as displaying a constant display of the current temperature until it is reset by the observer. For more information on the cooperative program, contact me at the Little Rock NWS.